REPLY TO THE CHARGES AGAINST ARCHITECTS IN THE LATE WESTMINSTER COMMISSION OF SEWERS.

SIR,—Your article upon this subject, in the number of the 8th inst., is written in so generous a spirit, that I avail myself of the appeal you make, and trouble you with a few observations as to certain parts of the evidence which you quote, and which was the first occasion of my being aware of it.

It was my intention, when I had perused the report on the late Commissions of Sewers (published without the appendix of evidence), and the commissions had been superseded, to have taken no further part in the question. I did, indeed, feel surprised at such a document proceeding from public men, who, having been commissioned by the Queen to inquire into what would appear to have been a mere question of science and economy, as to the very interesting subject of sanitary improvement, seemed only anxious to establish a foregone conclusion, and mixed up with their report much virulent personal matter. With that intent we find accumulated a mass of *ex parte* evidence, the object of which appears to be to charge with ignorance, dishonesty, extravagance, and perjury several bodies of public men. This inquisition is pursued in secret (like the Star Chamber practice of old); those against whom imputations were brought were not allowed to be present, nor, indeed, to receive the slightest intimation of the nature of the accusation; they knew not who were their accusers — what the evidence adduced — and were not afforded the opportunity of justification, refutation, or cross-examination. Under such circumstances of unfair, unconstitutional, and any thing but English procedure, is a report issued of a condemnatory character, written with a pen of gall.

But, Sir, your extracts from the evidence, which otherwise I do not know, and the handsome opportunity for an answer which you afford and invite, induce me most unwillingly to reply to accusations which I had hoped would have carried their own refutation. For instance, the paragraph relating to the construction of the 700 feet of sewer is so gross an instance of perverse insinuation, that I am sure a mere narrative of the facts will prove the worthlessness of such evidence.

I was on my way to attend the Court of Sewers one day, when I met Mr. Freake, the well-known and respectable builder, of Brompton and Eaton-square (called in the report a speculative builder!) He was with his solicitor, descending the stairs, when I said,—"On what business are you here?" He replied,—"We have been praying the court to bring us up an outlet for the vast quantity of sewers which I am about to build on the Smith's Charity Estate, but the court has refused, *as the officers report that there is no sewer in that part of the Fulham-road.*" "Then the court has decided wrongly," I observed, "for there is a sewer there;" and I took him and his solicitor into the ante-room, and, to their surprise, showed them *the line of sewer engraved on the published map of the court.* I advised Mr. Freake to withdraw the second petition, which had been founded on the ignorant and erroneous report of the officers, which had misled the court, to renew his first petition, and so to get a rehearing. The matter was taken into consideration at a subsequent court day. I proved that, so far from there being no sewer in that part, as stated by the officers, there was a sewer engraved upon the plan. The officers then explained that they meant there was only a *road-drain*, and not a sewer. Upon which I submitted, that the court could not, in reference to any means of drainage under their control, recognise a difference, or two classes, as to road-drains and sewers. I shewed that the court had had these sewers made over to them in the most formal manner, some fifteen or twenty years previously, by the Commissioners of Roads; and had undertaken to repair, cleanse, and keep them in order, and had done so ever since. That previously to 1800, the sewers received no other drainage than the water from the roads and lands, and that the admission of soil was not therefore necessary to constitute a public sewer. I observed that the proprietor of one house had been admitted by the court to drain conditionally into this very sewer; and that, according to a most just principle, when parties were disposed to construct public sewers on their property, of the capacity, materials, and depths required by the court, then the commission ought to provide an outlet and discharge. I submitted that the interpretation of the then existing law, of the inability of the court to construct sewers upon new lines, was already injuriously restrictive to the public; that the court had sought as much as possible to act in mitigation of this limitation; and, therefore, instead of rejecting this sewer, so solemnly adopted by themselves, they ought to avail themselves of this fair opportunity of carrying out that principle, and so take up and rebuild this old inadequate sewer or drain, or whatever it might be called, and thus provide an outlet for the petitioner's sewers, and otherwise afford relief to all this neighbourhood. Mr. Luke Flood, the magistrate, in a powerful speech, fully confirmed this view of the case, as did almost the whole court. The old sewer was ordered to be taken up and rebuilt, which received the confirmation of subsequent courts, and the surveyor of the commissioners so fully recognised the advantage of the opportunity for the district, that he extended the proposed line to a further distance, in order to relieve part of another main one. The sewer was built; the court have recovered a considerable portion of the cost from owners of premises on the line, and will in time be repaid the whole of the expense, or very nearly so, as they can *now* compel the owners to drain into it.

The insinuation then is this, that I could so far forget my solemn oath as a commissioner of sewers and my duty to the public, as to induce the court to do an irregular act, at the public cost, in favour of an individual, because he had occasionally to pay me fees as district-surveyor. But I trust that I have proved that I disabused the court from the wrong information given by their officers: that I acted upon a great public principle, and only took a proper course, as a commissioner, to procure to Mr. Freake that which he had a right to expect, and which he had originally applied for,—an outlet for his sewage.

You, Sir, must, I am sure, understand the relative positions of a builder and the district-surveyor. It is, in fact, an antagonistic one. The former is obliged by law to pay fees for service, not rendered to him, but to the public, for constant interference with his building operations, and, as you yourself are aware, occasionally for carrying out regulations sometimes of a vexatious nature. In fact, in all my proceedings with Mr. Freake, he knows full well that I have most strictly and sternly carried out the duties of my office.

The ungenerous colour attempted to be given to this matter, because I happened to be the district-surveyor, I indignantly repudiate. Were a like occasion to happen again, I hope that I have moral courage enough to despise personal consequences, and to stand forth to vindicate a public principle of action, and save an individual from a wrong about to be inflicted upon him through the ignorance and misrepresentation of the officers of the court.

It appears that Mr. John Phillips, the surveyor of the late commissioners for Westminster, and now a joint surveyor of the new commissioners, makes charges against commissioners because they did not concur in all his suggestions, and insinuates imputations because they *presumed to differ from him on some questions of science.* But although I supported some of Mr. Phillips' propositions, I certainly combated others, which, so far from being scientific, appeared to me quite the contrary, particularly as regards the junctions of two lateral sewers with another at right-angles.

I opposed his proposition as to having a timber platform, on which to rest the solid construction of the intended new sewer at Westminster. But I perceive, that the new commissioners are also differing from Mr. Phillips on the subject of this very sewer, and have referred it for revision to Mr. Austin, their consulting engineer. Mr. Phillips imputes personal and corrupt motives to the commissioners; particularly, I understand, to the professional members of the late court. Let us suppose that Mr. Phillips' father and brother had been employed as bricklayers, by the contractors, *upon sewers which he has had to superintend as surveyor* of the commissioners,—that improper work had been done by one of them, discovered by the clerk of the works, taken up, and never reported to the court, as done in other cases? What is the construction that might not, perhaps unjustly, be put upon these circumstances?

As to Mr. Hertslet, I will not handy imputations, nor pass any opinion as to the motives which could thus have induced him to make such charges against the professional members of the court. But I do claim this from your readers and the public in general, on behalf of the whole body of the commissioners, as well as for myself in particular, that no reliance be placed upon statements and opinions procured by such secret and *ex parte* means. No principles however pure, no conduct however honourable, can be proof against such stabbing in the back. These gross accusations would have been at once refuted, if the commissioner had been allowed the fair chance, the Englishman's right, of cross-examining the packed evidence, and bringing the whole facts of every act and matter connected with these proceedings fairly stated before a *public*, not a *secret* tribunal. They would then have submitted, in conscious integrity and with cheerfulness, to the judgment of their sovereign and the public, whether they had executed the trust reposed in them with uprightness, fidelity, and skill, as far as the laws of the land allowed.—I am, Sir, &c.

THOS. L. DONALDSON.

DOINGS IN BRISTOL.

IN order to advance the restoration of the beautiful church of St. Mary Redcliffe, Bristol, some of the more earnest minds in that city have associated themselves under the title of the "Canynge Society," and held their first meeting on the 3rd instant. An annual dinner, whereat the amount subscribed during the year is to be declared, and a portion of the building selected for restoration, forms part of the plan. A subscription of not less than 21s. annually, constitutes a member. Mr. J. K. Haberfield, whose name has been long associated with good works in Bristol, is the first president; and the mayor, the vicar of the parish, the chamberlain, and various members of the corporation are on the committee. The idea is due to Mr. Thomas Proctor, who has devoted himself for some years past to obtain the restoration of the church in question, which, as the address of the Canynge Society truly sets forth, "is one of the most beautiful examples remaining of medieval art, and a storehouse of associations, both literary and historical." The new society can scarcely fail to advance this object materially, but it seems to us quite extraordinary that such a step should be necessary in a city like Bristol, full of wealthy men.

The Exchange, one of the best works of John Wood of Bath, is to be restored. We mentioned some time ago that parties contemplated a renewal of the paint with which the stone walls of the quadrangle are covered. Some members of the town council, opposed to such a proceeding, called in Mr. Godwin, the architect, for an opinion, who advised that the walls should be fresh faced with the tool, and in making his report, alluded to the beauty of the building, and its miserable state of decay. This appears to have had some effect, for tenders have just now been sent in for restoring, stone by stone, a considerable portion of the building, under the town-surveyor. The Exchange affords a sad instance of the insubstantial nature of Bath stone. Although but one hundred years old (it was commenced in 1740, and opened September 21st, 1743), it is going literally all to pieces. It is to be hoped that some other stone will be used in the restoration.

The new Guildhall had a narrow escape from fire a fortnight ago, through the inflammation of some coke deposited in a cellar adjoining it. Once before it was seriously threatened. Last week, too, the Council-house and Stock Exchange were placed in great peril, by a fire which broke out in premises which divide the two buildings. The Council-house was at one time on fire.

The question of sanitary reform continues to

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